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REVIEW ARTICLE

E. P. Thompson

On history, sociology and historical relevance*

This very welcome and careful study of Methodism among the miners of a few villages in Durham between the 1880s and 1950s provokes as many questions as it begins to answer. This is, in part, a measure of the author's success: he asks some of the right questions, and explores these with caution and with appropriate evidence. It is clear that he has come to know the Deerness Valley, its present inhabitants, and their familial and community traditions, very closely: participant observation and repeated interviews have recovered much that is of value. But other questions are provoked by the inherent difficulties and limitations of his material—and also, on occasion, by a failure to ask certain questions or by a slight error in the question's aim. If I direct attention more to the difficulties than to the successes, this is because I feel that Dr Moore will prefer an argumentative, even critical, reception of his book to easy and uncritical applause.

Sociologists complain, at times, that social historians are insufficiently self-conscious as to their own conceptualization, and that they tend to offer their findings as particular findings, relevant only to their particular context, and are excessively cautious in making extended generalization. And social historians, of course, offer exactly the converse criticism: they sometimes find that sociologists are over-anxious to derive from particular evidence generalizations and typologies which are then translated to inappropriate contexts. In the last two decades this methodological gap has been narrowing, and the argument which bridges it is correspondingly less distant and much more fruitful. But that the argument persists may be illustrated by the fact that few social historians will like the way in which Dr Moore sets his problems up and enters upon his study.

There are two difficulties here, of which the first is the greatest. In an introduction, and at several other places, Dr Moore offers to examine a number of historical and sociological generalizations and typologies as to 'Methodism', or as to nonconformist or sectarian religion or the protestant ethic in general. But certain of these generalizations—some parts of Weber's theses, and general arguments about Methodism by Halévy, Hobsbawm and myself—are derived from evidence and from a historical-sociological context very different from the materials of Moore's own study. Nor are these differences small matters. The Methodism which was Halévy's subject—that is, Method-

ism from its eighteenth-century origins to about 1832—was more volatile and more fissiparous than anything to be found in these pages. The experiences of conversion and of epidemic revivalism must occupy the historian or sociologist of religion in ways which are not demanded by Moore's more placid and familial religion. (Eighteenth-century Methodist conversion could *split* families, bitterly, and alienate kin, whereas the established community religion of Moore's period appears as a socially-cohesive force.) In discussing the village Methodism of this century Moore usefully shows the pre-eminence 'of communal over associational ties' (e.g. chapter 5): the distinction is valid and is well sustained. But one doubts whether the distinction has got very much to do with Methodism as such. For in Methodism's earlier years scattered groups of adherents, often isolated within hostile communities, were linked together by Wesley's prodigious equestrian visitations or by the occasional calls of an itinerant preacher: and their faith was sustained precisely by associational ties which gave them courage from outside the parish. So that what we have here is not a characteristic of 'Methodism' but simply a characteristic of any religious (and in certain cases 'deviant' political) body which has ceased to be a sect and has become, precisely, intermeshed with its own community.

One might go on for a long time listing the differences of context between pre- and post-1832 Methodism. But what it is important to stress is that these differences are not just those of 'circumstances' or 'contingency'—the historian wriggling out of a necessary definition with some trivial local excuse—but those of sociological context and typological characteristics. To notice just two more: (1) it is central to Moore's whole thesis that 'Liberalism and Methodism . . . seem to cling together' (p. 23). But before 1832, and until the end of the reign of Jabez Bunting, official Methodism clung to Toryism: and in any case the notion of Liberalism is anachronistic and certainly inappropriate to dominant characteristics of Methodism in those years. (2) The fissiparous characteristics to which I have already referred not only reveal themselves, until the 1830s, in repeated splits and breakaways, argumentative chapels, disciplinary actions—they also reveal contradictions and tensions within the church which certainly don't appear to have anything like the same force in Moore's chosen communities.

But here, I fear, another problem of method arises, and I am not wholly convinced by the evidence presented. The strongest Methodist church in the Deerness Valley was not the orthodox Wesleyan connection but the Primitive Methodists. Moore does not discuss this question closely nor the deviance from the national ratio which is shown. The only clue provided is in Appendix I ('Research Strategy and Techniques'):

A major presupposition of this research was that there would be significant differences between these traditions [i.e. Primitives,

Wesleyans and New Connexion] as represented in the villages, in terms of membership, chapel polity, style of preaching, social and political outlook. This has not proved to be the case . . .

But the very serious trouble here is that Moore was dependent for much of his evidence upon interviews ('oral history'): and the Wesleyans and Primitives had merged in the 1930s—i.e. a good thirty years before his elderly witnesses could be interviewed. Hence his witnesses had all lived for at least thirty years in common communion with members of groups which had been, in earlier years, mutually competitive: and for some years before that (one may assume) the competition had been diminishing. But from such evidence we can know very little about the generation of Methodism in these communities in the 1870s or 1880s: as Moore warns, 'it is quite possible that the reported homogeneity of Methodism is a part of the mythology of the village. The villagers have a myth of a "golden past" in the villages, in which community spirit, homogeneity and mutual support are very important elements' (p. 231).

But, then, does Moore fully appreciate how far this very honest warning calls into question others of his findings? Oral history, even when controlled by strict interviewing techniques, must—when it is taken from elderly witnesses—reveal as much about the self-image of the witnesses, the 'folk-lore' of the elderly, as it does about actualities. These witnesses, born and socialized within an established communitarian faith, had all lived through the long decline of their own church. In today's world of chapel closures and dwindling and senescent congregations they must have been under considerable pressure to have emphasised a 'golden past'. Moreover, did they, as children or as adolescents, really know what scandals, conflicts of personality or of doctrine, contests for power or prestige, disturbed their parents and grandparents?

And here we encounter a second difficulty: how is the sociologist to approach strictly *historical* problems—that is, problems which are self-defined as such by the nature of existent materials—printed, manuscript, or architectural evidence which is not amenable to refined sociological techniques of investigation? Until 1914—and often beyond—Dr Moore is confronting exactly the same materials as will be employed by any social historian. I must state plainly that in my view, when the materials are historical, *there is no difference whatsoever* in the methodology appropriate to the sociologist and to the social historian: and that while it is true—as a matter of observable fact—that historian and sociologist may be disposed, by their previous training, to ask different questions of this material, this is an accident (often a happy accident) of pre-disposition: it does not indicate that there are two alternative disciplinary methodologies. Many questions may be asked of the same materials: sociologists in the last half-century pro-

posed many new ones which most historians had previously ignored: but in the last two decades social historians, sometimes—as in the important cases of Keith Thomas and of Natalie Davis—influenced by social anthropology, have been proposing their own comparative questions, and one has an impression that the sociological and anthropological professions, in keeping their methodological distance from ‘history’, have an increasingly theoretic and outmoded notion of what history has for some time been up to. I would hazard a guess that more British social historians today are conversant with sociological and anthropological journals than their opposite numbers are conversant with *Past and Present* or *Annales E.S.C.*

The point is that whatever questions are brought to historical materials, *historical procedures must be followed* and the materials will bear only those questions which are *historically relevant*. Dr Moore survives this examination, but only after some rough passages. One must surmise that he discovered for himself that questions proposed by Halévy, Hobsbawm *et al.* about pre-1832 Methodism were not relevant to post-1880 Methodism in the Deerness Valley, because, after the blast-off of irrelevant conceptualization in his introduction, he neglects to return to these in his conclusion. On other occasions he falters. His chapter on the ‘historical background’ is old-fashioned to a degree, and illustrates only too well that co-existence of contradictory attitudes towards ‘history’ which one finds rather frequently in established sociology: on the one hand history-books—*any* history-books which fall to hand—are used instrumentally as given data from which to reconstruct the tedious, trivial, but unavoidable ‘background’ of ‘facts’: on the other hand history as active analysis and conceptualization is disqualified on methodological grounds. In this case Dr Moore tells us things about Victorian ‘Liberalism’ which would be better told to the marines: offers us an itemization of Christian Socialist groups which is beside the point, since the ethical Socialism of the I.L.P. and the eccentric anarchism of Edward Carpenter appear to have influenced a handful of his miners more: but comes through rather well in his explanation of the specific characteristics of the Durham coalfield as compared to other mining regions.

What puzzles a historian more is his bibliography. Dr Moore has been at pains to collect some scanty (but revealing) manuscript sources—one or two diaries, some sermons, some letters. He has worked through some Methodist minutes and records with care, although his sampling methods would not satisfy a perfectionist historian. (Local weekly newspapers were ‘sampled’ for the first issue in each month, and Primitive Methodist sources for one year out of ten (p. 232)—but significant episodes, shifts and mutations don’t move to such a calendar of samples.) And there are other related sources, the testimony of much industry. But no Labour, mining or socialist papers appear to have even been sampled; nor Royal Commission and parliamentary evi-

dence on the mines or on social and educational issues in the North-East; nor the effective and influential voices of that North-East Liberalism which is so central to his thesis (such as the widely-circulating *Newcastle Chronicle* of Joseph Cowen); nor the reminiscent articles in Wesleyan journals, pious biographies of preachers, autobiographies of miners' leaders, which most districts of Britain produced in the late nineteenth century with such prolixity. Perhaps the Deerness Valley simply offered a blank in such materials and presented itself as a historical deviant? Or perhaps—and this is more likely, since Dr Moore has worked so long and so hard that he will scarcely have overlooked such materials—he neglected this kind of material since he considered it to be evidentially untrustworthy?

As of course it is. What incites a historian to a passing moment of irritation is the implication that a sociologist can discern the untrustworthiness of memoirs, partisan sources and the like, and a social historian cannot. For of course one part of a historian's professional training is, or ought to be, exactly a training in suspicion, and a training in different means of validating or invalidating source-materials which are always, in some degree, suspect. Let us take an example. John Wilson, the Primitive Methodist leader of the Durham miners and Lib.-Lab. M.P., receives 13 mentions in Dr Moore's index: it is true that he was not a Deerness Valley man, but the valley was in his constituency, he preached in its chapels, we are told that he was 'the friend of many of the leading Methodists' and, more than that, that 'the pre-1920 local leadership consciously modelled itself on Wilson' (p. 146). Indeed, if a model of Dr Moore's own thesis is to be looked for, John Wilson—respectable, temperate, class-collaborationist, individualist, Liberal, and to be found taking the chair at the Bible class when the theme was 'A man's a man for a' that' (p. 105)—is almost too good to be true. Yet Wilson's *Memories of a Labour Leader* (1910) are cited neither in the bibliography nor in the notes.

This can only be because Dr Moore regards this (and similar material) with as much suspicion as that with which I regard some of his witnesses' more distant memories. I must suggest not only that Wilson's *Memories* are relevant to the theme of this book, and ought to have been turned to use, but that their use would have forced Dr Moore to propose to his materials certain unproposed questions. Thus, in a rather unsatisfactory passage of argument (p. 231) Dr Moore implies that his Deerness Valley villages are, if not 'typical', at least 'not unusual', and may be taken as exemplifying *the effects of religion* (my italics) not only in County Durham generally but in pit villages throughout Great Britain. But if we lay his own reconstruction of the evolution of the Deerness villages beside such a source as Wilson's *Memories* we instantly become uneasy. Three pits and three mine-owners dominated this valley. One was a small Anglican mine-owner, and labour relations in this village were usually the most disturbed. One (Ferens and Love) was owned by

active members of the Methodist New Connexion. The third was owned by Pease and Partners, the notable Quaker mineowners. The mines developed in the 1860s and 1870s in a previously-agricultural area, with most of the labour being immigrant. The two major mine-owners (Ferens and Love, and Pease) provided company houses, schools and an administrative structure for the community. The high incidence of Methodist settlement at Waterhouses could even be explained (Dr Moore mentions in passing) by a deliberate recruitment policy by Pease ('It is alleged in the district that this [i.e. the favouring of Methodist recruitment] was the company's policy', p. 70). He should have held this allegation in his hand a little longer. In any case both Ferens/Love and Pease actively favoured the Methodists: made donations to their funds; found sites for their chapels; appointed missionaries and temperance workers to their villages, and overwatched their activities (Dr Moore can show this from what seems to be the *only* scrap of nineteenth-century managerial archive which he has been able to find in the County Record Office: p. 83). They perhaps also favoured Methodists in lower management and in preferential conditions at work, although the evidence here is less clear. All in all, these two substantial employers consciously built the Methodist churches into their structure of enlightened paternalist control. The chapter in which this is mainly described (chapter 3) is one of the most significant and well-sustained chapters in this book.

It is a valuable contribution to our knowledge. One wishes only that Dr Moore could have resisted that old sociological itch, the desire to generalize beyond permissible boundaries and the desire to claim typicality for what was a rather unusual pattern of development. Paternalism in this valley was not only attempted: it succeeded rather well. The valley, Dr Moore shows, was (at least until 1926) less disturbed during times of strike than other districts of Durham: as late as 1912 the miners' votes in the two main villages during strike ballots deviated from both the national and the county average in the direction of reconciliation and non-confrontation (p. 165); and yet there were plenty of Methodist chapels in the more confrontationist districts. And for John Wilson, conversion to the Primitives had led him on to a very different cycle of experience: anonymous union organization, unsigned letters affixed to the wagons calling for solidarity, dismissal, eviction from a company house, dismissal (under managerial pressure) from a post with the co-op, the attempt to drive him from the village. Conversion to the Primitives among the deep coastal pits of Durham or Northumberland, under bleakly non-paternalist ownership, could lead on to different crises of allegiance, with a more sharply class-conscious religious expression than in Deerness.

When Thomas Burt, the Northumberland miners' leader, was elected M.P. in 1874 the event was celebrated by a fellow pitman in the ballad: 'A Pitman Gan Te Parliament'. Some part of the

ballad turned upon the Bishops, 'guslin away on five thoosand a year':

But te git them te hiven, an' save them frae hell,
 The Bishups in futor mun fend fur thorsel,
 Becaas inte hiven, the Scripturs declare,
 Rich men like the Bishups kin nivor git there.
 So Tommy mun tell them te pack up thor kit
 As soon as they can, an' git ready te flit;
 Becaas i' the futor, as sartin as fate,
 They winna git paid frae the funds iv the State.

I have a hunch (but how can one prove such things?) that such attitudes were more 'typical' of North-East pitmen in the 1870s and 1880s than Dr Moore's Deerness Valley where 'conflict between Methodists and Anglicans does not seem to have been significant at all' (p. 76).

Let us abandon then the spurious claims to typicality and applaud what Dr Moore has given us, simply as it is—a specific case-study of a particular valley, informed by intelligent questions and careful research techniques. As such, the value of the study increases with its approach to contemporary times, simply because the materials used (and, crucially, the memories of respondents) become increasingly more reliable. While the recreation of the paternalist origin of the villages is done well, I am not happy with much in this book that pre-dates 1900, simply because the historical methods and controls employed are inadequate. As memories get brighter and other sources become more numerous, the quality of the study improves correspondingly. There are admirable sections on the communal functions of the churches in village life, although it is a pity that Dr Moore did not reconstruct with more care the annual calendar of ceremony and of sociability. The symbiosis of Methodism and of Liberalism at the turn of the century is well presented. The crisis of the old tradition at the time of the General Strike is among the strongest passages of analytic recovery. And in an exceptionally interesting chapter Dr Moore shows how before and during World War I, a very small group of socialists and pacifists, based upon the pit village with the least paternalist traditions, emerged from within the churches themselves and deviated sharply from the valley norm. This study, by means of contrast, throws into relief the norms of the conformist majority—a majority which, however, reabsorbs the dissident minority in the end, but only after shedding its Liberal skin and assuming a Labour form. It is a study which again and again rings true, reminding me of repeated examples of the role of a small group within a working-class community as precipitates of change—but of change of a kind which does not fulfil its own intentions. The implications of this finding may be more significant than other generalizations to which the author himself attaches greater weight.

Dr Moore's honest disclosure of his own methods provokes two further kinds of objection. The first concerns his lack of controls. It is not even clear how far his sampling and his interviewing extended to non-Methodist informants. On rare occasions such sources are cited. But since Methodism is seen generally from within, and from largely-Methodist sources, we inevitably are offered an approved image and self-evaluation. We are given not the paradoxes and equivocations of actual men in an actual society but an ideal (and hence wooden) typology. In general Dr Moore is aware enough of this danger, but he must work against the grain inherent in this kind of self-presentation. On occasion he appears to be bewitched by it himself. In discussing Methodist mutual improvement classes (p. 105) he claims that the men subjected themselves 'to what constitutes a rigorous intellectual discipline'; and again (p. 116) the Methodist trained his mind 'in critical thinking'. But he really has no substantial evidence for this at all, beyond the self-image of his informants, and the titles of a few meetings in such classes, one of which appears to have been 'captured' by socialist proselytes, the other of which included such titles as 'Evolution and Creation', 'Sunshine and Shade', and 'Phrenology'. Goodness knows what gymnastics of reconciliation between theology and natural science may have been attempted under the first heading: as for phrenology (a primitive psychology based on the bumps on a man's cranium) this had emerged with Lavater in the 1780s, entered into radical discourse with Combe in the 1820s, become an esoteric pursuit of cranks by the 1860s, and it is only a matter for pathos that Durham miners were discussing it still in the 1890s.

I am not disputing that Methodist working men, here and there, accumulated libraries and attained to intellectual accomplishments. I am disputing whether Dr Moore has adduced any evidence which can be resumed as 'a rigorous intellectual discipline' and then proffered as a generalization as to Methodism's 'consequential' influence. For he overlooks that this finding is at odds with other findings of his own. Thus he informs us (p. 96) that 'the theology of the average Methodist and adherent is intellectually unsophisticated, confused, unclear and at times totally unformulated'; and, of his informants, 'it is remarkable that none showed the slightest knowledge of historical differences of belief and structure', and 'they had little intellectual grasp of their religion' (p. 125). Moreover, it is this second finding which consorts best with that part of Methodist theology and rhetoric which emphasizes the blessedness of the pure-at-heart, of simple and respectable familial virtues, and which actively nourishes suspicion as to the snares and moral shallowness of intellectual attainment. I am by no means the only historian who has suggested that Methodist traditions evidenced, in this respect, a decline from the more intellectual traditions of the older middle-class and artisan Dissent—traditions in which we are told that stonemasons and weavers could argue the very difficult case of

predestination and free-will, or discriminate between Arianism and Socinianism. I am not prepared to leave the field in discomfort because Dr Moore has brandished a lecture-list at me containing 'Sunshine and Shade', 'Coal Dust' and 'Phrenology'.

Dr Moore is trying to have it all here: from Methodist informants and Methodist documents he is offering his own 'golden past' in which Methodists were respectable, tolerant of individualism, intellectually rigorous, self-disciplined, good husbands or mothers and (at the same time) communally integrated, responsible, given to mutual aid, etc. So persuasive is this that it is only in chapter 8, when a socialist conscientious objector who has died in prison is brought back to be buried by a small group of his comrades, who sing the 'Red Flag' again and again in the face of a crowd which boos and throws stones at the coffin (p. 200), that we begin to wonder seriously about the matter of controls. For this dead I.L.P. 'conshy' is himself a control of a sort, and he makes one wonder about the limits to the tolerance, intellectual rigour, respectability, mutual aid, self-discipline, etc., of that presumably mainly Methodist crowd. How far were Methodist ideals internalized? And if they were, has Dr Moore shown us their smiling uppermost face only? What was happening underneath?

I am asking a question which neither a historian nor a sociologist dealing with past time will be able to answer with precision. I can only offer my testimony, not as a disciplined observer, but as a neighbour and occasional participant over long periods of time in three different communities which had strong nonconformist traditions: Wester Ross (a breakaway from the 'Wee Free'), North Wales (Baptist and Methodist), and the West Riding of Yorkshire. In all cases one came to realize, after a time, that there was a folk-lore of humour within the community. I think it unlikely that much of this humour originated from the committed nonconformists themselves. It appeared more as a defence by the uncommitted within the community, and one would hear it only in certain places, certain pubs, certain times of sociability, and then usually only when it had been established that no-one in the circle would take personal offence. This humour—often particularized and personalized and often very funny—turned around traditional themes: above all, nonconformist hypocrisy—the easy target of the gap between men's professions and their actions—their secretive bad habits (including sexual habits)—their meanness—their officious zeal—their concealed mercenary motivations—their humbug. 'Have you heard the one about X?' the coalman in North Wales asked me last year, after looking round to make sure we weren't overheard. 'He's a deacon, you know, *very* strict. He was asked last week by a married man, "Is it all right to play cards on the Sunday?" "Oh no!" he said, "certainly not". "Then can you go to the cinema?" "Oh certainly NOT", he said. "Well, then, is it all right to make love on a Sunday?" "Now, we-ell, there's nothing wrong in that, provided you don't *enjoy*

it"'. (It is interesting to note that this everyday joke conforms very closely to Weber's comment (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1930 edn., pp. 158-9): 'Sexual intercourse is permitted, even within marriage, only as the means willed by God for the increase of His glory. . . . The same prescription is given for all sexual temptations as is used against religious doubts and a sense of moral unworthiness: "Work hard in your calling"'.)

Dr Moore's book altogether lacks the control of this laughter. And laughter *matters*, as a social phenomenon: it is a kind of criticism, a kind of self-defence. The defence may extend well into the periphery of the nonconformist organization itself. Dr Moore will have it that the influence of Methodism in his community must extend well beyond the actual number of the adherents. We can allow this, provided that he also will allow the opposite: back-sliding, agnosticism, boredom, the defences of humour, self-criticism—all these will penetrate the Methodist adherents themselves. People are more paradoxical in their behaviour than typologies allow. I have known the lukewarm Methodist husband of a fervent Methodist wife relax into a string of anti-Methodist jokes when his wife was safely off at Sunday School. But how is one to recapture this essential dimension through published sources or in a formal interview situation, which is by definition a humourless one? The essence of this shared humour is a moment of accord, outside of any formal structure.

The other objection—but we are now setting perfectionist standards which neither sociologist nor social historian ever attains—concerns the permissibility of isolating Methodism, or any other communal expression, from the total experience of its host community. Obviously we cannot proceed without some such isolation: but the isolation may withdraw from our notice some important influence or variable relevant to the matter under study. In this book rather substantial components of the miners' life are left unexamined or treated in a summary way. The miners' working life gets little attention: but its attendant risks and hazards of fortune may predispose the miner's mind towards certain kinds of superstitious beliefs. Where the management maintain full control over labour, there are very effective disciplinary powers and rewards in their hands to supplement other forms of paternalism. A pit is not just a pit, the same for every pitman. There are good and airy seams and cramped, wet, thin and dangerous ones: the favoured worker, especially when on bonus or piece-rates, could feel palpably the smile or frown of the manager. If Pease and Partners had actively wished to consolidate a Methodist work-force, they had these means to hand. Moreover, the mine-owners certainly had the schools to hand as a formative discipline in desired kinds of socialization: for the North-East owners had been early converted, and in the most explicit terms, to education as an instrument of social control. But if the normal weekday schools, which Dr Moore does not examine, were

doing this job effectively, does not this mean we must scale down a little (or a great deal) his claims as to the effectiveness of the Methodist Sunday Schools, which he does examine?

A more surprising omission is bleakly announced on p. 147: 'a discussion of the role of women and family structure in County Durham would be a digression'. The younger generation of historians of religion will be outraged by this: they go to great pains to try to establish the sex and age-ratios of their congregations, and they knew the critical importance of feminine commitment to a church. Moreover, mining is an industry which enforces more than most an extreme segregation of sexual roles. This segregation of masculine/feminine cultures, engendered within the community of masculine work, and then extended into non-working time, has always occupied the attention of historians, sociologists, novelists. It is surely central to the examination of any truly communal form of expression within a mining community to investigate how far it extends and perpetuates this pattern, how far it modifies it? Was Methodism exceptionally adaptable to the needs of such a community in particular ways, since it both allowed for the extension of male dominance in government and leadership (lay preachers, class leaders, etc.) and offered a field of independent activity and initiative for the women (sales of work, tea meetings), while at the same time affording some reconciliation of the alternative sexual cultures in the familial ceremonies of the Sunday service and the festal anniversary? It would be greatly unfair to Dr Moore to suggest that he is unaware of these themes, but he does not confront them centrally. A supplementary study from his hand on familial structure and sexual roles in the pit village, with reference to Methodism, would add to our understanding.

Methodism, under Dr Moore's investigation, can scarcely be seen as a theologically-determined form of religious expression at all. In its communal and consequential effects it is performing functions which were performed, in other times and places, by Owenite Socialists, by Chartists, by secularists, or—in certain recent or existent industrial communities in France and Italy—by the Communist Party, which also has its weekly and annual calendar of activities, its class meetings, its sales of work, for *Unita* or '*Huma*', its solemn anniversary rededications to the memory of the heroes of the Resistance, its socialization of the young, its differing fields of activity for alternative sexual cultures, its familial reconciliations. It is one of the merits of this study that attention has been focused upon these primary functions and effects. The smaller demerit of the book is that Dr Moore cannot prevent his writing-arm from gesturing towards sociological *non-sequiturs*. 'Where would early working-class movements have found their leaders without Methodism?' he asks rhetorically in his conclusion (p. 226). The answer of course is that they found them everywhere, and from almost every available cultural tradition: and that if he had employed more controls, he would

have discovered that the phenomenon of Methodist-domination in the second half of the nineteenth century was specific only to the miners, the agricultural labourers, and a few smaller groups.

A final point. It is not usual for a reviewer to comment upon criticisms of his own work in the book under review. But in this case Dr Moore devotes two pages to my own comments upon Methodism, in which he asks serious and carefully-phrased questions to which it would be a discourtesy *not* to reply. His criticisms are essentially two: (1) in proposing a distinction between the official doctrines of Methodism in the industrial revolution and the forms of expression taken within local communities, I fail to support this by evidence of systematic study of any such community. I simply suggest that we need more evidence, but what is really required is 'evidence of a *different kind*'. Dr Moore is certainly right in this criticism. In the last decade much local research has been going on: notably (for the eighteenth century) by John Walsh, and, for the period of the industrial revolution, by John Baxter, Barry Trinder, Paul Stigant, Clive Field, John Rule, James Obelkevich, Hugh McLeod and others. (Most of the results of this appeared too late to be of use to Dr Moore, and some have yet to appear.) But among the 'evidence of a different kind' required Dr Moore's own study must now take an important place.

(2) The second criticism offers more difficulties. Dr Moore suggests a contradiction in my analysis: at one place I suggest that the Methodist fellowship was the only cohesive community group which members knew in areas of rapid industrialization and immigration: at another place, I suggest that in practice the doctrines and forms of orthodox Methodism were 'softened, humanized, or modified by the needs, values, and patterns of social relationship of the community within which it was placed'. Dr Moore fairly argues that I am confusing two different situations here, and trying to have the argument both ways. At the least, the two situations should be distinguished from each other. In the second situation (he suggests) 'Methodism may be the religion of established working-class communities, which already have an elaborate work and leisure culture pre-dating the arrival of Methodism' (p. 10).

I think there is some evidence for both kinds of situation. But it is the second situation which most interests me: and my views on this, which found preliminary expression in *The Making of the English Working Class*, were more fully argued in a subsequent essay on 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism'. And the critical point is this: where there is an established working-class or plebeian culture, Methodism does not simply move in and 'adopt' this, enrolling existing communal forms within its own organizational forms, and incorporating the pre-existent pattern of work and leisure. On the contrary, there is a very sharp confrontation between the old culture and the new: early Methodism—and especially the early Primitives—drive head-on at certain features of that culture (emblemized by 'drink', 'gambling', old fairs and feasts,

old 'indisciplined' patterns of work and leisure, sexual licence, profane song, etc.): they may actively engineer confrontations between the old and the new. But after this initial confrontation, some process of selective adaptation (as in Bamford's Middleton) can often be seen to be going on. There is a transformation of certain components (perhaps critically-significant components) of the culture, but the perpetuation and adoption of others: in this sense there is an adoption *by* the pre-existent community *of* Methodism. But when I argued that this community made Methodism 'their own' it should be seen to be so only with the important qualification that this adoption was *subsequent to the initial transformation*. In many communities this adoption was never complete: the old and the new culture, dramatised as 'the pub' and 'the chapel', continued to co-exist and to compete.

Hence this initial situation of very sharp confrontation and of (partial) transformation is quite central to the understanding of Methodism. This is why it is disappointing that Dr Moore's study, based upon materials of an already ongoing established community religion, cannot handle this moment of culture-shock, whose often agonized personal and internalized expression is in the experience of 'conversion', and whose corresponding social expression is often in the phenomenon of highly-emotional revivalism. Even the examination of such materials as John Wilson's *Memories* might have taken him a little way here: for (as Wilson presents it) the experience of conversion at thirty-one—the renunciation of gambling and of liquor, the acceptance of a role as Sunday School teacher (and of the expectations attached to this role) is followed almost instantly by his acceptance of the role of trade union agitator and organizer. Interestingly enough, in Wilson's pit-village (unlike the Deerness Valley) drink is seen as being actively favoured by the owners, as a means to bribe and corrupt some pitmen and turn them into strike-breakers or hooligans. Among Tory election rioters in 1874 Wilson identified 'a few men who for some years had sold themselves, and were used for political and other purposes where unmanly acts were required, their pay being threefold—a smile from the manager, a good place in the pit, and beer *ad libitum*. Give them those things and their bodies and such souls as beings like them have were at the service of their paymasters for any vile purpose'. In such a context as this there is no difficulty in understanding how Primitive Methodism (the gaining of self-respect and of a 'soul' of one's own), teetotalism and union organization went together.

This corresponds with Dr Moore's own findings (esp. chapter 6). But in this analysis we have all—social historians and sociologists alike—been guilty of a major lack of control. *We have scarcely commenced a scrupulous examination of the characteristics of this old plebeian culture which was being confronted and partially transformed*. Keith Thomas has opened some doors to it, and it has for long been a preoccupation of my own research. But in the absence of such an examination we are all guilty of presenting

it only in its negatives: simply in terms of those features which Methodists or political reformers *rejected*: indeed, very often in the form of caricature—drunkards, gamblers, fornicators, layabouts; thriftless, unfamiliar, disreputable. In this Dr Moore is as guilty as the rest of us. His passages on the old culture of County Durham (pp. 140–2) simply register the incidence (or recollections) of drunkenness, fighting, criminality: ‘it is against the background of this rough life that we have to understand the Methodist’s knowledge of himself as a “saved” man’.

True, in part. But a culture is more than a ‘background’. This old culture had its own meanings, expectations, definitions of purpose; it had rich resources of song and of humour; a complex inheritance of folk-lore and of dialect (the expressive terms ‘hinny’ and ‘marrer’ come out of the old culture and endure into the new); and perhaps it had its own rituals and rites of passage which we are only now beginning to investigate. It is interesting to note that *two-thirds* of Wilson’s *Memories* relate to the first thirty years of his life before conversion, only one-third to the subsequent forty years of respectability and prestigious status. Nor are those thirty years any kind of recriminatory autobiography of drink, gambling and the rest: they describe an enterprising, observant itinerant workman, moving about England, serving at sea, following work to India and the United States, before finally settling back at the pits. How often, one wonders, was this kind of experience repeated? How far were the values of early Methodism coincident with the psychic acceptance of *settlement*, with the abandonment of the adventurous but hazardous and picaresque life of itinerant labour, and with reconciliation to the new industrial community as the only one within which one’s existence must be consumed?

The old culture or cultures were neither stupid nor animalistic nor to be defined only by their negatives. They demand delicate retrieval: but the technical problems of retrieval are such that many British social historians today find some of the concepts of social anthropology more applicable than those of sociology, if such a distinction is valid. The old culture may have endured with more tenacity in the North East than in most other parts of Britain, and this may be crucial to an understanding of Dr Moore’s own materials. He shows (pp. 140–1) that County Durham in 1875 headed the county list ‘for crime and intemperance’: an unusually high proportion of offenders were women (nearly 2,000 out of the 5,000 prisoners passing through Durham jail in that year). One would dearly like to crack these figures and find what kinds of behaviour and of consciousness were inside them. One is not even sure—although some of Dr Moore’s work rests on this assumption—as to how far Methodist expansion really did effectively dominate and subdue old patterns of behaviour. Did the incidence of ‘crime’ show a direct, or only an indirect, relationship to Methodist advance? And what of the rites of passage? In an interesting recent study in *Past and Present* Dr Olive Anderson has shown a remarkable irregularity in

the incidence of the registration of civil (as opposed to ceremonial church) marriage across the country. The highest incidence of civil registration in the last decades of the nineteenth century falls not in the large 'secularized' urban centres but in parts of North Wales, Devon, and, precisely, in mining areas of the North-East—all regions in which older cultures endured with tenacity. Durham, after all, was a county palatinate, in which the power of the Bishops as temporal princes had been felt for centuries. Had the old culture there, as a result, assumed a particularly sharp anti-clerical edge? Did it—here and there—endure through the transforming process of 'conversion' (just as the old dialect endured), sometimes assuming a Methodist dress as protective coloration?

In any case, the investigation of Methodism, especially in its origins, is pressing up against this barrier: our ignorance of what Methodists were converted *from*. Until this lock is broken, we must remain, more than we ought to be, the prisoners of the Methodists' own self-presentation of that confrontation. I will end with an irreverent anecdote. There was an annual dinner of the British mineworkers' executive—let us say it was within the memory of some still living—at which the then President was a devout Methodist (and also a devout anti-Communist) from a Northern coal-field. It was customary for a perfunctory grace to be said before this dinner. But on this occasion the President seized the occasion, as the other miners' leaders stood behind their chairs, to intone an inordinately long, self-satisfied, godly and officious grace. When at last he came to the conclusion, the leader of another Northern coal-field—a veteran class warrior and no respecter of persons—intoned after him, with loud solemnity, 'And *fookin'* Amen to that!' My informant was the leader of yet another Northern coal-field, an experienced political militant whose sense of responsibility did not allow him to alienate fellow trade-unionists in this kind of way. When he told me the story he shook his head sadly: 'He oughtn't to have done it, you know. But that's what he said. And *FOOKIN'* Amen'. But my informant's pretended disapproval was belied by the twinkle in his eyes: obviously he had not ceased laughing at the incident since it occurred the week before. He had witnessed the long-suppressed repartee of the old culture.

Each of these three characters has been around the British coal-fields for a hundred years or so: the officious, self-respecting, class-collaborationist Methodist lay preacher; the irreverent blasphemer, with his constituency not in the chapel but the pub; and the observant, class-conscious, self-disciplined secularist (sometimes a Marxist), suppressing his own distaste of religion in the interests of a larger solidarity. To examine any one of these components of the miners' culture we must keep the others always in view as necessary controls. There are some occasions when Dr Moore fails to do this, and at such places he offers us not a rigorous recovery of Methodist actuality but a reconstruction

from oral testimony of an approved Methodist self-image. Such passages are not frequent enough to devalue this study: but they came up frequently enough to irritate this reviewer, who could only get through them by intoning to himself, each time he turned the page, 'And fookin' Amen to that!'

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*Robert Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers & Politics; The Effects of Methodism in a Durham mining community*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, £5.30, pp. 292.

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